Christian Liberty

As it was

SOBERLY DESIRED

IN A

LETTER

TO CERTAIN

FORREIGN STATES,

Upon

Occasion of their late Severity to several of their *Inhabitants*, meerly for their Different Perswasion and Practice in Point of Faith and Worship towards God.

Made publick on the behalf of the present suffering Dissenters *within this Kingdom.*

Printed in the Year 1675.

HARVARD COLLEGE LIBRARY
FROM THE
ANDREW PRESTON PEABODY
FUND
Jan 31, 1936

TO THE
Supream Council
OF THE
STATES, &c.

The King of Kings, and Lord of Lords, who is God of all the Families of the Earth, incline your Hearts to Justice, Mercy and Truth.

THE Noise of your severe Treatment of several Persons that are Inhabitants of your State, reproachfully term'd QUAKERS, hath reached these Parts, and fill'd several with Compassion and Surprize: *Compassion*, to hear of the * Miseries of Men Innocent & upright, against whom you have nothing to object, but the pure *Exercise of their Consciences* to God: *Surprize*, That you, a *Protestant-State*, should employ your Civil Power to Deter, Punish and grievously Afflict Men for Answering the Convictions of their Consciences, and Acting according to the best of their Understandings. Methinks you should not be oblivious of your own Condition in the *Loyns* of your Ancestors, who, you think, with great Reason & Justice strenuously advocated

* *Our Account says, Some were* cruelly beaten *by* Order; *others* Banished; *some put in a* Dungeon, *and fed with* Bread *and* Water *only; several* Fin'd *greater sums of* Money, *it is thought, then they had to pay.*

 the

the Cause of *Liberty of Conscience* against the *Popes* Bulls and the *Spanish* Inquisition; how did they *Antichristian* all Force on Conscience or Punishment for *Non-Conformity*? Their own many and large Apologies, and particularly, their Demands at the *Diets* of *Norimberg* and *Spire*, are pregnant Proofs in the Case: and your Practice doth not lessen the Weight of their Reasons; on the contrary, it aggravates your Unkindness, let me say, Injustice.

Protestants (and such you glory to be thought) got their Name by protesting against Imposition; and will you turn Imposers? They condemned it; and will you practise it? They thought it a Mark peculiar to the *Beast*; and can you repute it the Care of a *Christian* Magistracy? I mean, that Persons must not live under your Government, unless they receive your Mark in their *Forehead* or *Right-hand*? which in plainer Terms is, to submit their Consciences to your Edicts, *and to ask your Leave, What Religion they should be of*. Remember, that *Faith is the Gift of God*; and, that *What is not of Faith is Sin*: Nothing can be more Unreasonable, then to compel Men to believe against their Belief, or to trouble them for practising what they believe, when it thwarts not the Moral Law of God.

You doubtless take your selves to be *Christians*, and would esteem it no little Injury to be otherwise represented; yet what more *Unchristian*, then to use External Force, to sway the Consciences of Men about the Exercise of Religious Worship?

CHRIST Jesus, the Lord and Author of the *Christian* Religion, censur'd his own Disciples, that would have had Fire from Heaven to destroy those that conform'd not to what their blessed Master taught: Are you surer of your Religion? Are you better *Christians*? Or, have you more *Christian*-Authority, then they that were the chosen Witnesses of Jesus? However remember, they *call'd* but for Fire from Heaven; and can you *kindle* Fire on Earth to devour them? *Them*, I say, that are of your own People, meerly for their Religious Dissent from you? Doubtless, if that was then thought

no

no fit Argument to induce Men to Conformity by him that was wiser then *Solomon*, it reflects greatly upon your Modesty and Prudence, that you should find out new Wayes, or rather old exploded ones to effect so ill a Design. Besides, you do not say, you know all you ought to know, or that there is nothing further to be revealed; have a Care therefore, that you persecute not Angels, by being harsh to that which you call Strange: Think not ill, much less speak, and least of all act that which is so against what you do not perfectly understand. I am well perswaded, that those you inflict such severe Penalties upon, mean well in what they believe (to be sure much better then you think they do, or else you are extremely to blame) and that the Reason of their present Distance from you, is not to introduce or insinuate Dangerous or Exotick Opinions, but to live a Life of more Holiness, Purity and Self-Denial, then before: They do not think that you walk up to your own Principles, and have Reason to believe that the Power of Godliness is much lost among you; and having long lain under a Decay and Languishing of Soul for Want of true spiritual Nourishment, they have now betaken themselves to that Heavenly *Gift* & *Grace* of God in themselves for Divine Satisfaction, even that Holy *Anointing* that is able to teach them all things necessary for them to know, as the Blessed Apostle speaks; and they find the Joys of the Holy Ghost in so doing: And I am perswaded, they are not less Peaceable, Sober, Just and Neighbourly then formerly, and altogether as consistent with the Prosperity of Civil Society, and I am sure, it is both found and confest among us here by some Men of *Quality*, *Learning* and *Virtue*. Further, be pleased to consider with your selves, that you justifie the ancient Persecutions of the *Christians* and first Reformers, whose Superiors thought as ill of them, as you do of these Men; nay, you show the *Papists* what to do in their Dominions to your own Brethren. Do as you would be done by: if you would have Liberty, give it; you know that God's Witness in your Hearts dictates this to you as an Immutable Law.

Could

Could you give Faith, it were more excusable for you to punish such as should resist; but since that is impossible, the other is unreasonable; for 'tis to afflict Men for not being what they can't be, unless they turn *Hypocrites*: That is the highest pitch your coercive Power can arrive at; for never did it convert or preserve one Soul to God; instead thereof, it offers Violence upon Conscience, and puts a Man either upon the Denial of his Faith and Reason, or being destroyed for acting according to them: But what greater Disproportion can there be, then what lyeth between the *Intellect* of Man, and *Prisons*, *Fines* and *Banishments*? They inform no Man's Judgment, resolve no Doubts, convince no Understanding: The Power of Perswasion is not to be found in any such Barbarous Actions, no more then the Doctrine of *Christianity*. This Course destroyes the Bodies and * Estates of Men, instead of saving their Souls: Were they in the Wrong, it would become you to use God's Weapons, his Sword of the Spirit, that saveth the Creature, and slayeth the Evil in him; This Course tends to Heart-Burnings and Destruction; I am sure it is no Gospel-Argument.

* *And* Property, *which they repute themselves Guardians of, is hereby lost.*

I beseech you for the sake of that Lord *Jesus Christ*, that suffer'd so patiently for his own *Religion*, and so sharply prohibited making other Men to *Suffer* for theirs, that you would have a Care, how you exercise Power over Mens Consciences. My Friends, *Conscience* is God's Throne in Man, and the *Power* of it, his Prerogative: 'Tis to usurp his Authority, and boldly ascend his Throne to set Lords over it. Were their Conversation Scandalous, and Destructive to the Good of your State, you were to be held excusable; But verely, no Man of Mercy and Conscience, can defend your Practice upon poor Men so peaceable and Inoffensive. *Gamaliel* will rise up in Judgment against you, if you persevere in this Course. Do not you help to fill the Catalogue of *Persecutors*, in much Love I intreat you; but as becomes *Christian* men and true *Protestants*, leave men

men to their particular Perſwaſions of Affairs relative of the other World, which have no ill Aſpect on the Affairs of this; but Vice hath an evil Conſequence as to both: Therefore puniſh *Vice*, and affect *Truth and Righteouſneſs*, and abend not your Civil Power to Torment Religious Diſſenters; but to retrive good Life, lamentably loſt amidſt the great Pretences that are made to *Religion*. Doubtleſs, *Magiſtracy* was both ordained of God, and elected by Men, to be a *Terror to Evil-Doers, and not to them that do well*, though of different Judgments. You oppugn the *Roman Church* for aſſuming *Infallibility* to her ſelf, and yet your own Practice maketh you guilty of the ſame Preſumption or worſe: For, either you do exerciſe that Severity upon an Infallible Knowledge, or you do not; if you do, you take that to your ſelves, your Principles deny to any *Church* whatever, which is a Contradiction; if you do not, you puniſh People for not conforming to what you your ſelves deny any Certainty about: And how do you know but you compel them to that which is falſe, as well as that which is true? Verely, this *Dilemma* is not eaſily avoided, as well as that this inhuman Practice will ſtain your Profeſſion, infame your Government, and bring a Blot upon your Poſterity.

Remember that they are Men as well as your ſelves, born free, and have equal Plea to Natural and Civil common Priviledges with your ſelves: The different Perſwaſion of their Conſciences about Things relating to another Life, can no wayes render them unfit for this; it neither Unmans nor Uncivilizes them. They have the ſame Right to their Liberty and Property as ever, having by no Practice of theirs in the leaſt forfeited any of thoſe human Advantages, the Great Charters of Nature and Scripture have conferr'd upon them: And the *Opulency* of your Neighbours, and *Proſperity* of their Affairs, prove to you that *Indulgence* is not inconſiſtent with *Policy*; howbeit, you have now tryed the *Sincerity* of their Procedure by what you have already inflicted, and they ſuſtained; Let the Time paſt ſuffice, and make them not Sacrifices

for their conscientious *Constancy*. If they are in the Wrong, 'tis more then they know: Will you persecute Men for being what they must be, if they will be true to themselves, this were great Violence; rather Commiserate, then thus violently Compel them. I beseech you, seek some cheaper Way to accommodate your selves, then by their Destruction, who are so very remote from seeking yours. *Oh! the Day will come, wherein one Act of Tenderness about Matters of Conscience, shall find a better Reward, then all the Severity by which Men use to propagate their Perswasions in the World*; and there is great Reason for it, since the one flows from the *Saviour*, the other, from the *Destroyer of Men*. In fine, *Let your Moderation be known unto all Men, for the Lord is at hand, whose Reward is with him; and he will recompence every* Man, Family, State, Kingdom and Empire, *according to* the Nature of *their Works, committed in this mortal Body*; at whose Bar it shall never be laid to your Charge, that out of Fear of taking God's Office out of his Hands, and being unmerciful to tender Consciences, you admitted Men of differing Judgments to dwell quietly among you; truly, you cannot be too tender in this Point.

Imitate the *God* of Nature and Grace, by being propitious to all; *his Sun shineth on all, his Rain falls on all, he gives Life and Being to all; his Grace visits all, and in Times of Ignorance he winketh*: And though such you may repute ours, I hope you cannot think you wink at it, who make such broad Tokens of your Displeasure. Oh! how forbearing and merciful is he towards you? Have you so lately escaped the Wrath of Enemies, and can you already thus sharply treat your Friends? Had he enter'd into Judgment with you, what had become of you? Let his Goodness to you prevail with you, to express Clemency to others, that so the Great God of the whole Earth, even the *God of the Spirits of all Flesh, who respects not the Persons of the Rich, Poor, or Powerful in Judgment*, may show you Mercy in the day of his Righteous Judgments, *Amen*.

London, the 14th *December*, 1674. W. P.